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Saudi Arabian Ministry of Agriculture Announces AI Outbreak in Commercial Farms

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Report Highlights:

On November 14, 2007, the Saudi Ministry of Agriculture confirmed discoveries of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 (AI) in commercial farms in Riyadh Province.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Trade Report
Riyadh ATO [SA2]
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Saudi Arabian Ministry of Agriculture Announces First Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 (AI) in Commercial Farms

On November 14, 2007, the Saudi Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) announced it had culled 50,000 parent stock broilers located on commercial farm in the Al Kharj region after 1500 bird had died earlier in the week. Al Kharj is a farming community 100 km south of Riyadh, the capital. According to the MOA the owner of the farm reported the death on November 12. MOA dispatched a veterinary team to the site to take samples from the dead poultry. PCR, hemagglutination and hemagglutination inhibition tests performed at the Riyadh's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory confirmed the presence of the H5N1 virus as cause of death of the birds.

On November 16, MOA culled more than 100,000 birds on three farms that produced table eggs due to detection of AI. Thus far, about 300,000 birds have been culled. According to MOA and major local poultry producers, the disease is limited to Al Kharj, Al Muzahimiya, and Dharma regions located in Riyadh Province which accounts for 14 percent (77,000 mt) of annual domestic broiler meat production.

Following the recent discoveries of AI in Saudi Arabia, many neighboring countries such as the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Jordan have imposed a temporary ban on imports of poultry and poultry products from the Kingdom. The GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, have a policy of banning imports of poultry and poultry products from all countries that report an outbreak of the AI virus. Saudi Arabia exports approximately 15,000 metric tons of poultry meat annually to the GCC countries and Yemen.

The Saudi Ministry of Agriculture cites migratory birds as the cause of AI infection on the four farms located in Riyadh Province. The government has established a national committee consisting of membership from the ministries of Agricultural, Health, Commerce & Industry, and Municipalities & Rural Affairs to investigate the reasons for the outbreak and report to the Council of Ministers as soon as possible.

The most recent discovery of AI is the second occurrence in birds thus far this year. In March 2007, the MOA announced the detection of dead birds (peacocks, ostriches, turkeys, parrots and other unspecified birds) on a recreational farm in the Eastern Province due to AI infection. In late January 2006, the MOA killed and burned 37 imported falcons after five of them died from AI infection.

To contain the AI outbreak, the Ministry has implemented its avian influenza contingency plan, taking the following measures:

1. The government put 25 workers who came in contact with culled poultry under observation in various hospitals in the Kingdom.
2. Banned bird hunting this season.
3. Killed and burned all birds and eggs found on the AI infected farms.
4. Sterilized the farms.
5. Conducted a comprehensive investigation of areas surrounding the infected farms to insure there were no other cases of the disease.

6. Initiated infectious disease tracing procedures and established a national committee consisting of four ministries to discover the source of the outbreak.
7. Urged residents to report to the Ministry any bird death.
8. Urged residents to strictly abide by the MOA's live bird quarantine decree issued on November 12, 2005. The decree banned the importation of live birds to prevent the entry of birds that might be infected with avian influenza. The Kingdom has on various occasions banned imports of live poultry and poultry products from countries reporting cases of AI. The November 12, 2005 decree bans hunting of migratory birds. In 2005, the government provided more than five million dollars to enable the MOA to purchase standby incinerators for its 25 quarantine centers to immediately destroy any imported live birds.